



Inaugural Address



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The Honorable James H. Hodges
January 13, 1999**

There are among you today two people I especially want to recognize.

Gov. and Mrs. Beasley, thank you for your dedication and your service to South Carolina.

Three hundred fifty two days, twelve hours.

As I prepared to take the oath to become South Carolina's 114th governor, I realized that's how close we are -- three hundred fifty two days, twelve hours -- to the year 2000, what most consider the beginning of the 21st century. On only two other occasions has a new governor of the state of South Carolina confronted a similar challenge. That's why I wish, in this the last inaugural address by a South Carolina governor in the 20th century, to tell you of my hopes and dreams for South Carolina, and especially for South Carolina's children, as we prepare to enter the new millennium. And I want to talk about what, working together, we can do to shape dreams into realities -- what we can do to ensure our state is prepared for the opportunities and ready to meet the challenges of the next 100 years.

South Carolina has a long and rich history. That history offers many lessons to ponder as we seek our state's rightful place in the next century.

Two centuries ago, scarcely more than two decades after the American Revolution, Governor Edward Rutledge was inaugurated as only the 35th governor of South Carolina.

At the beginning of the 1800s, South Carolina was part of a new and fragile democracy. Most South Carolinians were still feeling the negative economic effects of the Revolutionary War.

Only landowners could vote. Poor farmers, women and blacks had few, if any rights. Public education was virtually nonexistent. Governor Rutledge and other prosperous South Carolinians assumed their agrarian lifestyle would never change. They saw only prosperous times ahead.

But a century later, in 1899, South Carolina stood savaged by war and ravaged by economic collapse.

When Gov. Miles McSweeney stood here at the capitol to present his inaugural address as the 19th century painfully came to a close, it's hard to believe he foresaw any realistic hope of prosperity for South Carolina in the near future.

South Carolina's history of the last two centuries teaches many valuable lessons.

Despite examples of individual greatness and heroic struggle, the shortsightedness of the leaders of earlier times failed to alert them to three critical realities.

First, economic prosperity depended on economic diversity.

Equally important, prosperity for South Carolina could only be achieved if leveraged by equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, gender or economic standing.

And third, lasting prosperity could only be ensured by a system of quality public education.

Yet, South Carolina's history, particularly its more recent history, teaches inspiring lessons of leadership and courage as well. As the 21st century nears, South Carolina -- phoenix-like -- has risen from the darkest days of war, prejudice and economic impoverishment.

Early in this century, Gov. Richard I. Manning helped reunite the state into one South Carolina after years of bitter factionalism.

Five decades later, former governors Fritz Hollings, Bob McNair and John West provided inspired leadership during the integration of our schools and our places of commerce.

In all our long history, there has been no greater engineer of public educational change for our state than former Gov. Dick Riley.

And it was former Gov. Carroll Campbell who introduced the world to South Carolina's talented workforce and their unparalleled work ethic.

Today, unlike centuries past, we're poised to put South Carolina on the march to greatness for the next 100 years -- if we have the courage to heed the lessons of history.

One is an economics lesson. The Hodges administration will be a pro-business administration. We will be pro-business because we know the lives of our children depend on our state's continued economic prosperity.

Economically, we have a solid base of tourism, manufacturing, service industries and agriculture, along with the beginnings of high-tech industry.

South Carolina is on the verge of becoming a major player in the global marketplace.

But this is just the beginning.

Not only will we continue to recruit industry, we will accelerate efforts to capture better-paying, high-tech jobs for our state -- the kind of jobs that will fuel the economic engine of the 21st century.

But economic success alone is not enough.

As a businessman, I believe that we can protect our natural environment at the same time we foster our business climate. The beauty of our state -- its pristine beaches, protected wetlands, and precious forests -- must be preserved for our children.

A second lesson history teaches is that the source of much of our strength to meet the challenges of the 21st century is in the strength of our people. But it must be all of our people.

I'm a baseball fan. Last year, the National Baseball Hall of Fame welcomed Larry Doby as a

member. The induction of a native son of Camden into that great Hall was a well-deserved tribute.

But the recognition of only the second black baseball player in major league history to break the color barrier underscores what great baseball was lost by fans and players alike by the exclusion of African-Americans from our national pastime for all those years.

Thankfully, we're beyond those days.

I pledge that the Hodges administration will be an administration that celebrates inclusion. We are reaching out to members of all races, genders and ethnic groups for governmental appointments. We realize we aren't going to win any 21st century championships with half the team sitting on the bench.

There is a third, and most important, lesson that history teaches.

Nothing, nothing is as important to the future of our state as quality public education.

The only way to realize our dreams for South Carolina in the next century is to improve our public schools. I believe the overriding reason I am standing here before you today is that South Carolinians delivered a mandate last November that education must be our number one priority.

I ran for governor on a platform that stressed the value of education. For me, it's no Jimmy-come-lately conversion. I was born and reared in Lancaster. Both my mother and father stressed the value of getting a good education, the pathway for going as far and as high as my talents would take me.

A life-shaping experience - it taught me the value of hard work -- was a summer job at Springs Mills. All day, every day, I shouldered cloth or tended the card machines that turned raw cotton into fiber. Around me worked men and women with little or no formal education. Almost all wanted a better life for their children and grandchildren. They knew the wisdom of the old saying, "Education is the one thing in life that can't be taken away from you."

We cannot let those good people, and everyone like them -- we cannot let them down. We've got to do a better job educating our children.

Everything else -- all our hopes and dreams of economic prosperity, protecting our precious natural resources, appreciation of diversity in the decades to come -- everything else depends on a first-rate program of public education.

That's why I am asking all South Carolinians today to join me in launching a children's crusade. A 21st-century crusade of textbooks and computers and parents and teachers allied against the enemies of ignorance and indifference.

All of us in South Carolina want our schools to be the best. Most of us believe wisely investing the dollars to make them the best will reap dividends for generations to come. But there also needs to be what the business world calls "accountability." We need prudent management of every hard-earned dollar you contribute to your local schools.

Because the Hodges administration is committed to improving education without tax increases, we must adopt a statewide lottery with all the revenues targeted for specific educational needs.

We must begin by aggressively moving to cut class size in the early grades and implementing a strong pre-kindergarten program.

Lottery dollars, coupled with a commitment to make education the top spending priority in our state, can help create a truly superior educational experience. South Carolina's children deserve nothing less.

We must launch a crusade for our children because that's what it will take -- a commitment from those of us in government, parents, teachers and the business community. If we need inspiration to join this crusade, that inspiration is close at hand.

My colleague Jim Hunt, the distinguished governor of the other Carolina, challenged the people of North Carolina to do better by its children. And what followed was a visionary program of early childhood education. Because of Jim Hunt's leadership, every child in North Carolina will start school healthy and ready to learn.

Lake City-native Darla Moore generously donated \$25 million to the College of Business Administration at the University of South Carolina. And then she had the courage to stand before state lawmakers and tell them they needed to do more for public education or her gift might go to waste.

Educators like Superintendent Herman Gaither from Beaufort County are demonstrating the innovative thinking necessary to give our children the opportunity to excel in the next century. In his district, laptop computers, school wide networks and Internet connections are helping build a generation of thinkers and problem solvers.

But it's not just individuals who've made good on their commitment. When global software giant Policy Management Systems of Blythewood went looking for skilled workers in South Carolina, they came up short. Instead of continuing to bring in outside workers, PMSC decided to grow its own.

Under the leadership of Larry Wilson, the company adopted the Marion Three School District. You can find it 100 miles from PMSC, located in one of the poorest areas of South Carolina. With pledges of financial support, equipment purchases, and most of all, one-on-one mentoring by employees, PMSC plans to stay and partner with the local community for as long as it takes to make Marion Three the pride of the Pee Dee.

But perhaps all we really need for inspiration is our children themselves. I am especially pleased to see the five-year-olds from Mrs. Schwartz's class at North Elementary School in Lancaster here today.

These students are among the first to receive full-day, publicly funded kindergarten. They alone should be all the motivation we need to join in the crusade to march South Carolina's schools on the path to greatness.

Like many speakers on such occasions, I looked for an inspirational story to conclude today's remarks. I didn't have to look far.

Earlier I mentioned that when I was growing up, my parents stressed the benefits of education. My mother, Betty, went one better. She provided a living example. After completing high school, my mother began college work, with dreams of a career. But she was forced to withdraw from school

for lack of funds. Marriage and family followed.

But she never gave up on her dreams.

When I was three, with the encouragement of my father, my mother went back to college. With three young children, her only times to study were early in the morning and late at night. But she kept at it -- course after course -- until she finally earned her bachelor's degree.

But that was just the beginning. The same year I was graduated from high school, my mother earned her Ph.D. What followed was a distinguished career as an educator helping many non-traditional students like herself realize their dreams.

My mother never gave up on her dreams; she never gave up on her dreams for me. Join me, so that our children never have to give up on their dreams.

Other leaders, from other states, have claimed that the next 100 years belong to them. They're wrong.

I promise that I will devote to this office every bit of strength and heart and mind that I possess.

And with the help and support of my family, especially my partner for 11 years, my wife Rachel -- with the help and support of the people of South Carolina -- and with the blessings of almighty God, the dawn of the 21st century will herald a period of unrivaled prosperity, boundless opportunity and most importantly, the golden triumph of education over ignorance that will lead a future South Carolina governor, standing in this very spot 100 years from today, to look back with pride and truthfully proclaim that the 21st century was indeed "The South Carolina Century."

Thank you.